



Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

107-1 | 2019

Friches en montagne : problématiques, enjeux et opportunités

The Military Brownfields, an Opportunity for the Urban Redevelopment of Small Mountain Towns?

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/5198>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.5198

ISSN: 1760-7426

Publisher

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine

Electronic reference

Stéphanie Lotz-Coll, « The Military Brownfields, an Opportunity for the Urban Redevelopment of Small Mountain Towns? », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 107-1 | 2019, Online since 06 April 2019, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/5198> ; DOI : 10.4000/rga.5198

This text was automatically generated on 19 April 2019.



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The Military Brownfields, an Opportunity for the Urban Redevelopment of Small Mountain Towns?

Stéphanie Lotz-Coll

- 1 Confronted with more frequent sudden changes, cities are considering the conversion of their brownfields in a logic of urban attractiveness and renewed dynamism. Beyond these two objectives, urban mountain territories must also incorporate the inherent in mountain spaces territorial development constraints and anticipate the impacts of climate changes.
- 2 In this context, the abrupt cessation of activity of a mountain military site raises the immediate question of its future. Beyond the land gain related to the brownfield, this article asks the interest of the conversion of this type of brownfield for a small mountain town.

The mountain, a favourable space to the use of urban brownfield?

- 3 Today, while the geomorphological and climatic aspects limit *de facto* the possibilities of development in mountain, human factors also constrain the land development, especially in non-urbanized spaces: the land reserves for the agricultural activity or the natural spaces specific system of protection contribute to rarefy the building plots. In addition, since 1985, the recently revised Mountain Law regulates the specific to the mountain town planning with the to construct in continuity obligation, the partial no constructability of lacustrine shores or the application of a specific procedure for new tourist units' projects. While their targets were to limit the sprawl and promote an economical management of the mountain territory, these rules could be at the origin of many disputes and were then paralyzing.

- 4 The mountain territories, especially the high alpine valleys, are also characterized by their human diversity. Rich in contrasts, between disinvestment, attractiveness, aging and innovation, these vulnerable areas attract populations whose expectations are different from those of large cities concerning services and job opportunities or business creation, but that must be satisfied despite the development constraints. This can become an issue of attractiveness and local dynamism. (Barbier et al., 2016)
- 5 In such a context, any re-use of a space in an urban environment, such as urban brownfields defined as “abandoned land in urban areas, pending hypothetical re-use” (Dorier-Apprill, 2001, p.36) is of interest as it could be subject to valuation. This ancient phenomenon of urban brownfields concerns a set of buildings and spaces which the society had to use at a given moment. The evolutions of the society then progressively made them obsolete, the craft or industrial activities evolving with the fluctuations of the economy and the progress of the techniques. In the mountain environment, the generation of these urban brownfields can be part of two major types of urban mutations (Piron, 2002): on the one hand, the gradual changes, plot-by-plot changes that result from individual choices of private or public investors, without upsetting the overall logic, and on the other hand, the brutal changes in which the function of an urban sector suddenly loses coherence, imposing a rapid change of assignment. The consequences on the urban fabric and the socio-economic balance of the valley can be severe. The necessary conversion of many alpine sanatoriums, particularly in Switzerland during the post-war period, is an illustration of this (Grandvoinet, 2017).
- 6 Mountain urban areas are now experiencing both types of change. For example, with snow falling by 30% over 30 years in the Alps, the future of small resorts seems uncertain, even though station closures remain rare. In addition to these climatic changes, the world of mountain tourism includes many uncertainties and structural crisis factors such as competition from other tourist destinations, a divide between large and small resorts, new recreational practices, a certain aging of the touristic population or increased environmental quality requirements (Dodier et al., 2012). This prospect of a depletion of the from the mid-twentieth century inherited tourism model (Knafo, 1991) may augur a deep recomposing of these territories that will require adaptations possibly based on the mountain touristic brownfields.
- 7 It is precisely in this sense that the French State voted in February 2016: thirty years after the first Mountain Law, the “bill for the modernization, development and protection of mountain territories”, then adopted, integrates the experienced by mountain territories changes such as land scarcity and environmental issues. One of the four axes of the text proposes a reorientation of the construction towards the rehabilitation of the leisure real estate to avoid the touristic brownfields and preserve the natural soils for the benefit of the agricultural uses. Therefore, touristic urban brownfields resulting from the gradual transformation of winter tourism could thus become new development opportunities and be developed by the feedback from recent brutal changes, particularly with the redevelopment of mountain urban military brownfields.
- 8 Indeed, the Alps have hosted many military infrastructures because of their strategic position and the mountain heritage includes many built from the time of Vauban forts.
- 9 Old differently-converted urban military sites also testify to this characteristic of a desire for greater border protection period of construction in Besançon or Grenoble. This last town, a with numerous military buildings old stronghold, characterizes the variety of

military buildings in the Alps, including the fortifications of Mistères Vauban and Séré de Rivières. These same military sites, long considered as obstacles to the urban expansion of the city (Grandvoinet, 2011), have for a part allowed the urban expansion of Grenoble which has been able to overcome its geomorphological constraints (Lotz, 2017). In general, the urban military sites of recent construction mainly correspond, for their part, to the barracks that hosted the Alpine Hunters, specialized mountain troops created in 1888 while Italy, with its unification, became a threat for France to the alpine border.

- 10 The French Ministry of the Armed Forces sells military sites, which it no longer has the use of, both to dissociate itself from the obligations of maintenance and securing, and to promote the change of use in a logic of economic and social compensation of the departure of the militaries, the challenge is thus to quickly find a new function to these brownfields.
- 11 In this regard, each city has its own development logics, so the use of brownfields in Grenoble and Briançon does not meet the same issues. Nevertheless, this principle of requalification of urban barracks often faces two major obstacles:
 - The ignorance of the activities that took place there, including for the urban brownfields, contributes to consider these sites as extraordinary in the first sense of the term;
 - The departure of the militaries and their families must be compensated on an economic and social point of view.
- 12 In the general case of a small mountain town, the cessation of activity of a military site often symbolizes a trauma because the Defence activity represented an economic weight that was both complementary to winter tourism activities and a generator of a residential economy. The armies are then sometimes considered as one of the first activities in economic terms and they create a pole of centrality. However, this is less true for larger cities, such as Briançon whose closure of military sites does not constitute a real economic upheaval: the city wishes to take advantage of these conversions to initiate a new urban dynamic.
- 13 Beyond this vision, the end of the presence of the army is also part of a larger dimension, both identity and symbolism, which combines the departure of the militaries to the reform of judicial and hospital maps and so more general to public reforms that contribute to the feeling of abandonment of so-called peripheral territories by the State.
- 14 The second part of this article proposes to return to these points by considering, on the one hand, the possibility of trivializing the military brownfields at the end of its cession by the Armies, and by specifying in what context its requalification could represent an opportunity for the concerned cities, on the other hand.

The mountain military brownfields, spaces for opportunities 'reconversions'?

- 15 Since the end of the last century, the 2000- and 2010-years military programming Laws allow the French State to adapt the location of the French armies to the new geostrategic constraints with the absence of threats on the alpine border and a decrease in mountain military manpower. The Armies therefore sell quickly lands and buildings which they no longer have the use. In a context of sustainable development, this raises the question of the specificity of these military brownfields, especially urban, because they can allow, within the framework of a requalification, to overcome the constraints of the Mountain

Law by offering available for new activities lands. However, the secrecy of their past activities frequently contributes to increased mistrust of this type of brownfields, especially as the relative autarky of the site during the period of its military activity has maintained a form of independence with the whole urban development. Nevertheless, some elements of answer could be brought about the potential trivialization of this type of land resources at the end of its cession (Lotz, 2017). For this, three main aspects have been considered, considering the very nature of the military brownfield, the conditions for the transfer of the site, and finally the way in which the concerned municipality can consider the reinstatement of this new site in its urban fabric. Given the general diversity of the military brownfields, it was necessary to differentiate the sites by proceeding in two stages: on the one hand, to define those which could answer the criteria of categorization of brownfields based on three large sets already highlighted (Guelton, 1998) and on the other hand, to verify the applicability of this differentiation to the typology of military brownfields in the mountains:

- A first group of military brownfields includes very marked by their initial use sites with in ruins buildings that retain traces of the military presence, including pyrotechnic pollution or a marked architecture.

These sites, frequently away from urban areas, are of less interesting for urban requalification. These are the Vauban forts, sometimes acquired and maintained by associations in a patrimonial logic, but for which the possibility of another requalification remains marginal.

These sites, too architecturally marked and too restrictive in terms of sustainability cannot be trivialized;

- A second group includes barracks and housing. These brownfields, lightly marked by the Army and with a certain density, are easy to assimilate to the city because they offer favourable architectural characteristics and a good integration with the urban networks. The former military barracks of the 7th Alpine Chasseurs Battalion, at the entrance to Bourg-Saint-Maurice, have been converted into a large hotel complex complemented by a business park and a covered market.

These sites correspond to barracks or mobilizing centres of alpine towns. These new real estate resources make it possible to increase the urban density. They can therefore be considered as common brownfields.

- A third group brings together the bare unused land and partially built brownfields on the edge of the city. In the mountains, these military brownfields, if they cannot be considered as land resources, sometimes complex to reconvert, are often requalified in the principle of their initial activity, such as the military heliport that once hosted a crew training centre east of Gap Airfield.

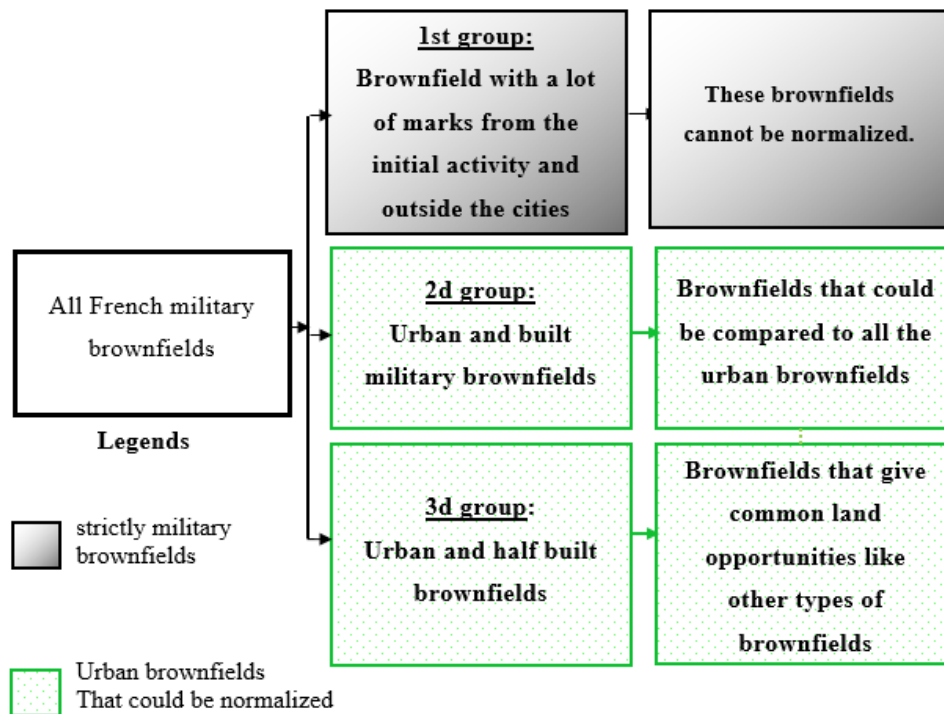
16 At the end of the departure of the military, regarding the nature of the abandoned space, when it is not too marked by its initial activities and that it benefits from a favourable situation compared to the city, the mountain military brownfields can therefore be likened to any urban brownfields. The process of surrendering a military brownfield, which is not specific in a mountain frame, is like that of other brownfields or large landowners.

17 The last other potential source of distinction for a military brownfield is financial or business incentives for redeployed military sites. However, for prior to the Military Programming Laws sales, these aids were relatively mixed and not strictly dedicated to military brownfields. When more land was lost on the land market, these financial

measures gradually evolved to include only military sites whose redevelopment is now systematically integrated into site contracts with dedicated funds. This financial context has become an exclusive feature of the military brownfields.

- 18 The urban military brownfields thus look like a brownfield of some kind whose reconversion is done in a specific context.

Figure 1: the trivialization of the military wasteland



Done by the author

- 19 This classification of military brownfields therefore applies to mountain sites and can be a relative asset for small fragile cities. However, faced with the diversity of the military brownfields and the conceivable for these sites' reconversions, the 2000- and 2010-years Military programming Laws were differently welcomed by the local authorities: when the ministry of the armies sells its good to favour the change of use, the challenge is to quickly find a new function to this brownfield. This is all the truer as local actors, especially municipalities have a purchase priority for this site whose transfer may require, to a certain extent, to rethink the city, or even territorial coherence. It is also for the municipality to secure or block access to the site to not be responsible in case of accident.
- 20 In the context of the cessation of activity of military sites, recent urban military brownfields take on another dimension with the question of the supposed role of the Ministry of Defence in land-use planning (Regrain, 1998). Beyond the strict holding of land that could represent an opportunity in the context of the restrictions related to the Mountain Law, the brownfields carry all the economic and social consequences of the departure of the militaries, especially when the concerned cities are doubly penalized since 2007, by the effects of the general revision of public policies, since 2012 by the modernization of public action or when they have to start considering post-tourism. The

requalification of these mountain military sites must then participate in a new positioning of the territory.

- 21 Recent research (Lotz, 2017) has confirmed that reconversion of a brownfield is not acquired a priori for a military field but that it must be considered as part of an overall project for the benefit of city, especially when it comes to brownfields. For this, the urban project approach (Laperrière, 1998) provides an adequate context for creating a synergy between the existing urban fabric and the new functions of the renewed brownfield. However, if this first notion is a first sine qua non condition for the success of the conversion of a military site, it must also be associated with other factors to gain attractiveness and / or dynamism:
 - ◦ Generic elements such as the existence of a structure carrying the project of reconversion on the scale of the concerned territory. However, this financial and technical portage structure is complex to consider for a small mountain town with limited financial resources;
 - In response to the before requalification identified needs, it is necessary to prioritize the to be taken actions to make the appropriate trade-offs and to maintain coherence in the overall project;
 - Other elements are directly related to the declination of the project: the following example of Barcelonnette will bring the illustration.
- 22 From these elements, the reconversion of the military site could offer the opportunity of a new economic impulse with a leverage effect which is divided into three major items, the residential and economic attractiveness and finally the image effect of the city leading the reconversion project. These three effects are frequently interconnected but sometimes difficult to achieve, as in the case of Barcelonnette below.

The Ubaye valley and its military sites: a typical example

- 23 Located north-east of the Alpes de Haute-Provence department, the Ubaye valley stretches 80 kilometers from east to west.

Figure 2: Barcelonnette, an alpine valley in south-eastern France



SOURCE: gÉOPORTAIL, COMPLETED BY THE AUTHOR.

- 24 The strategic position of the valley has favoured its military vocation: attached in 1713 to the France kingdom, the valley was endowed with six redoubts of which only remains that of built by Vauban Berwick and re-used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a deposit of ammunition. If the Revolution then offered real military opportunities, with up to 10,000 men stationed in the valley, the Ubaye valley was only in the 1830s mass fortified with the construction of the Tournoux Fort and then with Mr Séré de Rivières, with the construction of numerous batteries or forts to protect the valley from an Italian invasion (Coste, 1995).
- 25 However, while the progress of the artillery made these fortifications vulnerable, André Maginot imagined another fortifications program and allowed the construction of various works that were targets of many fights during World War II (ibid.). At the end of the War, a battalion of Alpine Chasseurs settled in Barcelonnette and the forts were demilitarized and abandoned.
- 26 Regardless of this military activity, the main income source of the valley has long been the textile with a subsistence agriculture. Today, classified as “high-mountain dry zone” under the disadvantaged agricultural zones, the valley is characterized by a turned towards the breeding agriculture with a use of mountain pastures or summer pastures on more than 35 000 hectares. Maintaining this agricultural and pastoral activities in the valley is essential for the preservation of territories and landscapes (French ministry of Defence, 2009).
- 27 The construction of the Serre-Ponçon dam in the 1950s, followed by the installations of the ski resorts of Pra-Loup, Le Sauze and Sainte-Anne de la Condamine marked a turning point in the economy of the valley, which now lives mainly from summer and winter tourism. In fact, the Ubaye Valley is also characterized by a great natural wealth associated with various perimeters of environmental protection and biodiversity inventories such as the Natura 2000 network and the presence of the Mercantour

National Park which also participate to the rise of green tourism. On the same way, the tourism of memory develops itself with the visit of some forts, like that of Tournoux.

Figure 3 : The Tournoux fort

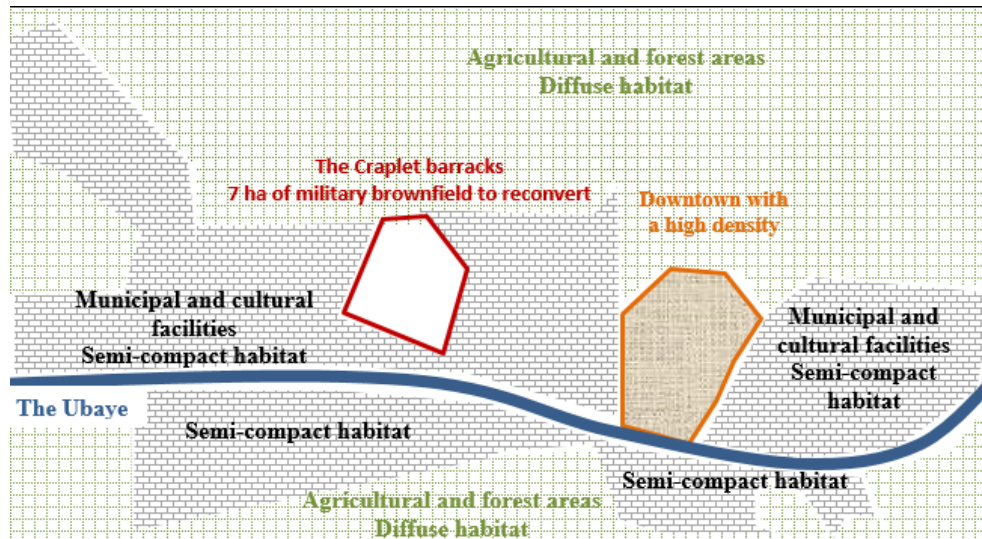


Source : site <http://www.ubaye.com/sortir/fortifications-ubaye.html>

- 28 In general, while the installation of the planned railway has never been completed, the lack of public transport infrastructures complicates the access to the valley, which is still marked by the absence of large companies and a weak organization of very small businesses companies.
- 29 With a population of 8145 inhabitants, the Ubaye valley remains far from the regional urban centres. However, it has assets with a natural and cultural heritage that allows an annual offer for tourism. On the other hand, its weaknesses are common to many mountain territories: a partly subject to climatic hazards economy, a low population density and mobility problems in the territory.
- 30 Barcelonnette, located at 1135 meters altitude, 90 kilometers from Digne-les-Bains and 70 kilometers from Gap, is the urban centre of the territory. If it does not directly host a ski resort, however the city receives the financial benefits of winter tourism from neighbouring sites.
- 31 In addition, for more than half a century, the local economy has taken advantages from the economic weight of the military with the presence of the 11th Battalion of Alpine Hunters. However, in 1990 as part of the first national reorganization of the Defence stationing, the 2000 Army Plan disbanded this battalion: the immediate impact was the departure of a total of 120 military families. This was a first blow to the local economy which has since initiated a diversification including gastronomic aspects.
- 32 This battalion was partly replaced by a detachment of the National Centre for Mountain hardening, which also left in 2008 and therefore ended 60 years of military presence which strongly marked the valley identity. In fact, the militaries were present on various

sites, especially in the heart of the communes of Barcelonnette and Jausiers, for a total of 11ha. On an urban level, this departure leaves large urban areas brownfields and the question of their future is quickly raised: is it to consider them as opportunities for diversification of activities in the valley? What are the requirements for Barcelonnette?

Figure 4: Barcelonnette, a semi-compact urban morphology giving pride of place to the future military brownfield



Done by the author.

- 33 Beyond this urbanistic perspective, it is above all an immediate economic and social trauma with the disappearance of 121 local jobs (85 soldiers and 36 civilians, including 12 linked to private maintenance and security companies) and the significant loss of 3,300 trainees who attended the hardening centre each year. At the school level, the departure of children from military personnel (i.e. 87 children in school) is also a danger for the maintenance of small rural schools.
- 34 This brutal departure of a stable population who significantly participated in the social life of the city raises the question of the possibility for Barcelonnette to compensate the end of these military activities. This is even truer since the suppression of the garrison also has an impact on the local economy, the economic weight of the military being very significant: 45% of the total budget of the hardening centre (€ 530,000) directly concerned the Ubaye valley (*ibid.*).
- 35 The challenge of managing the departure of the military is therefore at once urbanistic, economic and social. Faced with this brutal transformation of the city (Piron, 2002), it is important to define a coherent urban project (Laperrière, 1998) that provides a global response based on an initial territorial diagnosis. As part of the revitalization contracts put in place for the conversion of ceded sites, Defence is proceeding in two stages to promote the emergence of an urban project. On the one hand, it defines, in close consultation with all the elected officials, the perimeter of the municipalities that are most impacted in socio-economic terms by the departure of the militaries to circumscribe the implementation of the scope of application of the Contract of Revitalization of the Ubaye Valley (CRUV). This applies to 14 municipalities including Barcelonnette and the 3 ski resorts in the valley. This diagnosis also includes an analysis of the for the territory

identified needs which could be satisfied as part of the conversion of the military site to transform these into opportunities.

Figure 5: The perimeter of the Ubaye valley site contract (CRUV)



SOURCE: GÉOPORTAIL DE L'URBANISME, COMPLETED BY THE AUTHOR

- 36 For the Barcelonnette area, while the target is a diversification strategy to find less dependent on tourism activities, four strategic priorities have been identified to create favourable conditions for job creation and the economic revitalization of the valley:
 - economic development to facilitate the installation of small and medium-sized enterprises,
 - the revival of the wood industry,
 - consolidation and diversification of the tourist offer throughout the year,
 - the diversification of training offers and the promotion of the fostering of research activities.
- 37 In a second step, within the framework of the CRUV, the French State has financially committed with a total 3.5 million euros in addition to annual subsidies and financial and fiscal accompanying measures.
- 38 The 7ha of the Craplet district, in the heart of Barcelonnette, have been converted to accommodate a hotel business and institutional actors that are vectors of stability for the early stages of conversion: the main relief centre of the Valley, the Centre of public finances, sports associations and a high school of cabinetmaking. They participate in the leverage effect: the financial investment made for the renovation of their reception facilities could be offset by the attraction of new companies wishing to benefit from this reassuring context and confidence in the future of conversion (Lotz, 2017). In addition, they demonstrate a positive dynamic with a desire to set populations and attract young people.

Figure 6: The district Craplet reconverted

Source: <http://m.ccvusp.fr/hotel-entreprises.html>

- 39 The reconversion of the military site was deliberately part of a logic aimed at giving a new breath to the Ubaye valley, which allowed to rehabilitate the equipment of the three stations of the valley, Praloup, Sauze and Sainte Anne the Condamine and enhance military heritage and hiking tours on released by the departure of the military mountain sites. The creation of a wood industry in Jausiers, a university reception centre for the fostering of researchers and a balneotherapy centre complete the ensemble.
- 40 The balance of this reconversion is complex to evaluate: on one hand, it is positive because Barcelonnette managed to maintain its population at the same level despite the departure of the militaries. In fact, the city did not want to compensate number for number the loss of jobs linked to the departure of the militaries, but it more wished to infuse a dynamic whose effects will be felt in the medium term (Lotz, 2017). We can therefore speak of a certain leverage effect, especially since a logic of post-tourism strictly winter is initiated. On the other hand, negative points remain: the budget balance of the Barcelonnette town remains fragile and the former urban military site of Jausiers is still a brownfield due to the lack of coherent project for its reconversion.
- 41 More pessimistic voices (Martin-Charpenel, 2015) question the territorial diagnosis prior to conversion, which would have been incomplete and would has not sufficiently consider the specificities of the mountain territory. In fact, Barcelonnette was put in the classification of rural revitalization zones at the beginning of April 2017.
- 42 While the high alpine valleys are frequently mountainous territories marked by a diversity that contrasts with the category to which they belong, that of “very poor old-age campaigns: class 3”, in the Typology of the French campaigns carried out by the DATAR (Barczak et al., 2012), is it coherent to apply to them the used for more populated centres or valleys logic? This is all the truer as these valleys are distinguished from each other: a moderate residential growth for Haut-Giffre and Beaufortain, high access times

to the everyday life for the Haute-Maurienne, with elements of marginality (Prost, 2004) and adaptation and innovation (Bourdeau, 2009, Attali et al, 2014).

- 43 This also raises the question, for the reconversion of the recent military brownfields, of the adequacy of the contracts of revitalization for mountain sites. Are three years of implementation, with a possible extent of two years, enough to convert a fragile and very specific local economy?
- 44 In a constrained by regulatory planning land context, brownfields, particularly the urban ones, are both feared and coveted as potential land resources.
- 45 The brutal urban transformation imposed by the recent forced conversion of many mountainous military brownfields has been a shock. However, it could provide an opportunity for experience feedback in the context of the potential reorientation of mountain tourism activities. Jean-Denis Rispaud, speaker during the seminar: "What future for the mountain economy?" (Barcelonnette, April 21, 2017) precisely concluded in these terms: "It is necessary to diversify the economy, [...], to multiply the potential of development between stations and valleys. Salvation will come from our ability to innovate".

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ABSTRACTS

In a frame of limited land resources, mountain territories need to consider the reconversion of wastelands that have lost their functionality as potential source of attractiveness and dynamism. In a context of sustainable development that is also beginning to consider what could be the future activities that could mitigate the abandonment of small peripheral cities in terms of urban centrality, the brutal urban changes due to the recent departure of militaries from some small mountain garrison cities allow to consider a first return of experience regarding the redevelopment of military wastelands and the project engineering implemented to achieve this. After putting into context, the interest represented by wastelands, especially urban, for mountain territories, this article proposes a focus on the military wasteland, with, on the one hand, a reflexion on its trivialization and on the other hand, the context in which its reconversion could be considered as a success. A final part illustrates these elements in a concrete way with the recent reconversion of Barcelonnette and the Ubaye Valley.

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Keywords: wastelands, military wastelands, urban mutations, reconversion, leverage effect

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